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Sheffield, James Rockwell

Introductory address at the
thirty-first annual Lincoln...

[New York]

[1917]

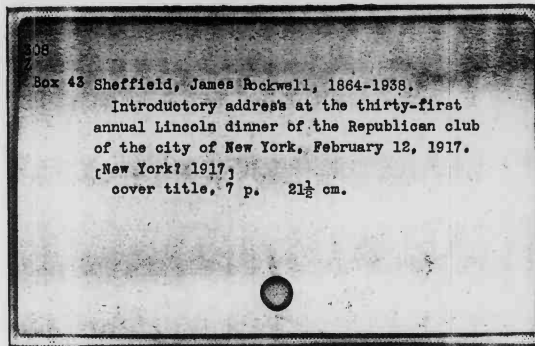
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INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS

BY

JAMES R. SHEFFIELD

At the Thirty-first Annual Lincoln Dinner of the
Republican Club of the City of New York

FEBRUARY 12, 1917

May 18, 1917 B J L

ADDRESS BY JAMES R. SHEFFIELD

As President of the Republican Club of the City of New York

February 12, 1917

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, FRIENDS AND ASSOCIATES OF
THE REPUBLICAN CLUB, FELLOW COUNTRYMEN ALL
OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN:

It is a privilege and an honor on behalf of the Republican Club of the City of New York, to voice its cordial welcome. The anniversary and the man determine our theme.

It is the 12th of February, a saint's day in our national calendar, now become a red letter day in the world's calendar of saints.

It is the year 1917 and thus our thirty-first consecutive Lincoln dinner.

It is a time when "God is testing out the souls of men before his judgment seat", and in a war-worn, war-torn world, Americans may invoke the benediction of one who amidst the hatreds of civil war could still say, "With malice toward none and with charity for all."

We of the Republican Club believe in the spirit of Abraham Lincoln. Under the influence and inspiration of his name, we seek to forget the things that divide us, and to remember only our common allegiance to *the*

America for which he lived and died, and to open wide our hearts in patriotic hospitality to all who reverently love the greatest of all Americans.

It is an old custom, these Lincoln dinners, and the story we each year repeat is not new; but patriotism is not born of novelty, and memory is more potent than surprise.

The beauty and fragrance of the rose is not lessened by familiarity. A marble of Praxiteles, or a masterpiece of Titian, gazed at through the centuries, still inspires the world of art. The magic tones of the violin linger long after the matchless fingers of the music master have ceased to touch the strings. The shell the sea casts on the shore holds treasured forever in its heart the reverberating songs of the ocean.

So the American people, standing tonight by the dark waters of a "deeply troubled sea", may well pause to listen to the echoes of the oft repeated story of his life, and to learn again the truths fixed eternally by his death. For as long as manhood is honored, and love of country endures, the simple story of Lincoln, like the cradle songs of childhood, will reawaken noble memories and rekindle patriotism in the hearts of men.

The Lincoln Day lesson for us is not pride in achievement, but appreciation of character—not Lincoln the majestic, but Lincoln the man.

Since last we met, there has been given to the nation, for perpetual remembrance, the Kentucky farm

on which stood and still stands the log cabin where, 108 years ago to-night, Abraham Lincoln was born.

Who knows, but to Thomas Lincoln, hewing from the virgin forests the rough logs to build his home, there came a prophecy of the future, to fill his heart with joy. And who can doubt but that to Nancy Hanks, looking in the face of her tiny babe, on that winter's night, there came visions of a redeemer's work still to be done, while through the unsealed logs, beams of another star of Bethlehem touched the lips and anointed the soul of the infant Lincoln.

What was a cabin home on the far off edge of a western frontier, has become a temple in the geographic heart of a continent, and a shrine in the human heart of a nation.

To that shrine those who truly love their country and their fellowmen will go for help and inspiration. What heart does not respond with reverent memories as he journeys "up to Jerusalem", or feel a nobler patriotism beneath the shadows of Bunker Hill, amid the quiet loveliness of Mount Vernon, or the splendors of the mausoleum on the banks of the Hudson, where sleeps the great Commander.

Go to that Kentucky shrine, men of America, and learn again the lessons of his life. See for yourselves the poverty of his birth. Picture the loneliness of his childhood, the privations of his youth, the struggles of his early manhood, and behold from such environment,

at the age of fifty-two, the emergence of the gaunt, awkward figure who walked without compromise and unafraid, into world politics and a civil war.

Recall his mastery of self and masterful leadership of men, his justice tempered with mercy, his wisdom enlightened by humor, his speech—the noblest and purest in our language, his character—commanding the affection and admiration of his countrymen and the homage of the world; and then dare, if you will, to assert that democracy is a failure and free government a mistake.

It was but a few weeks ago that a British statesman repeated words of Lincoln as defining the only terms upon which another war for freedom and civilization shall end.

What! The bareheaded child of the log cabin, the barefooted boy of the Kentucky wilderness, the rail-splitting youth of the western frontier, the flatboatman of the Mississippi, the storekeeper of an Illinois village, the country lawyer of Sangamon County, the homely, caricatured President of a disordered country, quoted by a British Premier in the Halls of Parliament, on the issues of peace or war for half a world in arms!

He who had asserted at Gettysburg that "Government of the people, by the people, for the people, should not perish from the earth", was speaking a prophecy, the final fulfilment of which is being determined tonight on the battlefields of Europe.

They said he was a politician. So he was. He understood the minds, and touched the imaginations of a great people. The thing he did not understand was the art of the demagogue; the thing he could not construct was a political machine. No faction and no party was ever organized in his interest. He used power and patronage, not for himself, but only for a cause. "What is a Collector of Customs", said he, "to the saving of the Union?"

Oh, politicians of a later day, why belittle a title which should be a badge of honor? Cannot you see the harm you do your cause, your country and yourselves, by turning into petty struggles for personal power and self-aggrandizement the effective organization and leadership which should be used only for the common good and welfare of a nation?

Go to that Kentucky home, men of America, and learn again the lessons of patriotism, and of free government which derives its just powers from the consent of the governed, a truth too little understood in the old world beyond the seas.

Freedom can never be imposed by force, maintained by written constitution, or preserved by statute. Self-denial, self-sacrifice, service,—these are the commands laid on every man, and woman, too, who would preserve the spirit of free government in the unending war for freedom.

Honor and respect for the rights of others, whether one or many, whether individuals or nations, must go hand in hand with power and acquisition.

Power is the supreme test of character.

Liberty and self-government are not synonymous. It must be a liberty limited by law and a government in which each individual, be he one or many, has his every right. If you destroy that safeguard, you are preparing the ground for the planting of despotism, for there is no autocrat so heedless as an unrestrained majority, and no tyrant so cruel as the tyranny of the mob.

These trite truths you may also learn in the rude doorway of that frontier cabin.

No man and no nation may know what the morrow may bring forth. The duty is put alike on each to prepare.

He who will not defend his honor and his liberty is a craven. He who will not fight for his birthright of freedom and the protection of his flag is a traitor.

When the American flag, flying at the masthead of a ship assassinated on the high seas, sinks beneath the waves, it carries with it not property alone, nor human lives, but the *sovereignty* of a nation.

A people that will not fight to keep that flag and all it stands for, afloat, does not deserve to have had a Lincoln.

Whoever strikes at that emblem of freedom strikes at the things for which Concord and Lexington were fought, at the vision of free government for which Washington lived, at the ideals of free men for which Lincoln died. Any military power that, for its own ends, would destroy that symbol of Washington's vision and Lincoln's ideal, must itself be destroyed, if freedom is to live.

That flag means more than mines and factories and wealth; it means more than the sovereignty of a great people; it means our birthright of freedom. And when it sinks, it carries with it the liberties of the present and the hopes for the future of all mankind.

No one wants war, but there may be times when life and liberty and freedom can be kept on earth on no other terms.

Peace with honor; no peace without. That is the message of Lincoln. It is the lesson of his life; it is the teaching of his example; it is the benediction of his death. The preservation of the spirit of the liberty he left is the one alchemy which may transmute the baser metals of our nature into the pure gold of American patriotism.

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